

**WILTON WATER WORKS
PUBLIC HEARINGS
JANUARY 28, 2016
TOWN HALL COURTROOM
CORRECTED MINUTES**

1 WILTON WATER WORKS held two public hearings and its regular monthly
2 meeting on Thursday, January 28, 2016 at 6:30 PM in the Town Hall Courtroom.
3 Present were Commissioners William Condra (Chairman), Steve Elliott and
4 Frank Edelblut; Superintendent Mike Bergeron; Clerk Joanna K. Eckstrom;
5 Ledger-Transcript Reporter Ashley Saari; WPD Officer William Hickerson; and
6 about fifteen Wilton Water Works customers.
7

8 Chairman Condra stated that the Public Hearings were advertised (in the Ledger-
9 Transcript); he called the meetings to order at 6:30 PM. He outlined the agenda
10 and said that commissioners would first discuss the matters at hand after which
11 the public would be invited to speak. Anyone who wished to speak should
12 identify themselves, spell his name and provide address for the record.
13

14 *Wilton Water Works Eastview / Lower Main St Capital Reserve Account*
15

16 Note: Following paragraph was not spoken during public hearing but is included
17 in the minutes for information only.

18 *Background – Account, established several years ago; should have been closed*
19 *and remaining money re-purposed when the Eastview project was finished. In*
20 *2008, then sitting Commissioners held a legally noticed public hearing and*
21 *directed that the account be closed and moneys re-purposed to paint the tank.*
22 *For some reason, this action was never carried out and account is still open; fund*
23 *balance in August of 2015 was \$46,570.*
24

25 Tonight's meeting is being held to gain public input about re-naming /
26 repurposing the account.
27

28 Commissioner Frank Edelblut explained that Weston & Sampson (who did an
29 extensive survey of the 'above-ground' elements of the system) recommend
30 putting about \$92K a year into a reserve for future needs as well as respond to
31 catastrophic failure. Mr Edelblut added that the WWW proposed rate increase
32 (to be considered in the other public hearing tonight) covers both operating costs
33 and saving for the future. The current Commissioners generally agree that some
34 action should be taken so that WWW can build reserves. Mr Condra then
35 opened the floor to public input.
36

37 *Rick Sheppard (Abbot Hill Acres Rd) asked about other WWW reserve*
38 *accounts and their value. Answer One account is earmarked for the purchase of*
39 *Quinn property on Rt 31S (where wells are located) – estimated value \$650K.*
40 *And there are three other accounts which, when combined with the Eastview*
41 *account, have a total value of about \$125K.*
42

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43 There being no other questions, public input closed at 6:43PM. Mr Condra
44 said there would be further discussion during the regular meeting later on.

45
46 *Wilton Water Works User Fee / Rate Increase*

47
48 Mr Condra called the Public Hearing to order at 6:45PM. Purpose of the
49 hearing is to receive public input and discuss rate increase to be effective with
50 first quarter 2016 billing (Jan 1st – Mar 31st). Suggested is a \$33 User Fee plus
51 \$3 per 1000 gallon usage per quarter.

52
53 Mr Edelblut repeated the recommendations from Weston & Sampson (\$92K
54 addition to reserves each year) and explained that reducing the number to \$60K
55 each year can achieve the goal in three to five years with less burden on the rate
56 payers. Average annual water bill in Wilton is about \$200 – with proposed
57 increase, it would go to about \$300 annually. Suggested rate is still far lower
58 than other towns – Greenville charges user fee of \$65 per quarter plus \$6.50 per
59 (1 or 10K) gallons used.

60
61 Superintendent Mike Bergeron said that Greenville's water needs far more
62 treatment than Wilton's – hence the greater cost. Bergeron, Edelblut and other
63 commissioners all agreed that WWW's number one responsibility is to deliver
64 safe water to customers.

65
66 Commissioner Steve Elliott agreed with the suggested rate increases but
67 hoped that it could be phased in. Was concerned that going from \$23 to \$33
68 user fee was excessive. Edelblut said that user fees should cover fixed costs.

69
70 Mr Condra said that the WWW runs an efficient operation; one full-time
71 superintendent with part-time help (from highway and others) as needed. WWW
72 expenses are paid by users but also sees need to plan for future via reserves.
73 Agrees that putting aside \$92K per year is a lot and hopes that a starting point of
74 \$60K per year can be worked out. Said commissioners welcome public input.

75
76 *David McBee, Eastview* – feels important to keep user rate the same (or
77 minimal increase) and increase usage instead. This encourages conservation.

78
79 *Randy Caswell – Burns Hill Rd* – how is money to be used? What has been
80 done in past?

81 Answer - The current rate structure covers operations and is break-even.
82 Reserves are earmarked for specific projects or needs – for example, painting
83 the inside of the water storage tank (due every ten years) costs about \$150K. If

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84 you build up the Water Storage Maintenance account gradually, you don't need
85 to impose a rate increase to do it.

86
87 *Glen Christino* – said there's no question about needing to save but thought
88 the suggested increase of 50% is excessive.

89
90 *Bill Chalmers* – asked if highway department can do any of the work
91 contemplated for the reserve accounts? And what about selling Wilton's water to
92 other customers as a way to increase revenue.

93
94 Answer – no – the projects require special expertise and equipment that
95 Wilton Highway department doesn't have. It is more cost-effective to use outside
96 contractors for this type of work.

97
98 Mr Condra said that previous (and current) WWW commissioners declined to
99 extend water lines east to Milford partly because of concern with becoming part
100 of the Pennichuck system. Also, to do any kind of extension would be cost
101 prohibitive – pumps, pipes, etc.

102
103 *Tracey Ewing – Pine Valley Street* – suggested that she is more comfortable
104 with increasing usage rate – encourages conservation. She said she understood
105 that Greenville's rate is higher because more treatment is needed.

106
107 Mr Elliott offered that W&S report shows \$850K as cost of an additional tank.

108
109 *Tom Schultz – Burton Highway* – As a former water commission, he's aware
110 of W&S recommendations which include a third well or a second tank. Any
111 expansion of the system or adding capacity needs funding.

112
113 *David McBee* – does insurance help with anything? Answer – there is
114 insurance (coverages need to be explored) but insurance funds are only
115 available in an emergency and do nothing to help with long-range planning.

116
117 Mr Elliott said it's about \$995K to replace what's above ground. At \$60K per
118 year, that's about 17 years to raise the money.

119
120 *Patty Chalmers – Gregoire Circle* – agree that usage increase is better.

121
122 *Ashley Saari – Ledger Transcript* – If first increase is done now when would
123 next increase be needed?

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124 Answer – Mr Edelblut – Commission would have to look at its options on a
125 regular basis; said no increases would ever be made without public hearing
126 being done.

127
128 *Chris Carter – Maple Street* – (sewer commissioner and water customer) –
129 How much time does WWW have to spend the money in reserve? And is a rate
130 increase going to cover all expenses?

131 Answer – No specific time frame; if a project is no longer viable or if needs
132 change, a public hearing would be needed to decide what to do. Mr Edelblut
133 feels that the rate increase offers us some protection as we can plan for future
134 needs.

135
136 *John Gove – Dale St* – asked about Hydrant Rental. WWW gets \$19,800
137 from the Town for hydrant rental. WWW gets no income from water used via the
138 hydrants.

139
140 *John Jowders – Spaulding Drive* – Agreed that a 50% increase is a big hit;
141 wants moderation.

142
143 Mr Elliott commented that the public seems to be amenable to increase the
144 usage rate vs the quarterly fee.

145
146 *Rick Sheppard* – what is status of underground system?

147 Answer – W&S report deals only with above ground; underground structures
148 are old, some 100 yrs plus. Eventually, will need replacing.

149
150 *Tia Allen – Island Street* – asked about painting the tank? Was town without
151 water when this was done? Answer – no, tank was by-passed; no major
152 disruption of service.

153
154 *Calvin Beam – Abbot Hill Road* – asked why rate increase discussion is not
155 being held at Town Meeting.

156 Answer: - Chairman Condra and former Chairman Tom Schultz explained that
157 WWW is separate from the Town; income is from User Fees rather than property
158 tax dollars; also users are in Wilton and Milford, so forum is by way of Public
159 Hearing such as that being held tonight.

160
161 *Sarah Severance – new to Wilton* – concerned that increase is too high.

162
163 *Randy Caswell* - concerned about the annual fee for his sprinkler. Mike
164 Bergeron stated that sprinkler has special fittings and water use is not metered.

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165 Tom Schultz said that the state requires sprinklers in rental properties; WWW
166 suggested he come to meeting to request remedy.

167
168 *Bill Chalmers* asked about difference between capital improvement and
169 maintenance – generally capital improvements have a cost of \$10K and up.

170
171 There being no other input, Mr Condra closed the public hearing at 7:50PM
172 stating that commissioners would be talking about this and may come to a
173 decision later this evening during their regular agenda. Folks were invited to
174 stay.

175
176
177 Respectfully submitted,
178 Joanna K Eckstrom, Clerk